THE WORLD.

NUMBER XCIII.

By *ADAM FITZ-ADAM.*

To be continued every THURSDAY.

THURSDAY, *October* the 10th, 1754.

IT is a very true, though a very trite principle, "that the point of perfection is at a middle diſtance between the two extremes:" and whoever is the leaſt converſant with the world, will have frequent opportunities of convincing himſelf of it's importance, whether he applies it to the morals, manners, or other objects of human action.

I SHALL make it the ſubject of this day's paper to particularize the danger of paſſing too precipitately from one extreme to the other, in an inſtance which I conceive to be of very material conſequence to the entertainment, inſtruction, and virtue of mankind.

THE diſtinguiſhing characteriſtic of the laſt age was PEDANTRY. Every man appeared ſo ſenſibly convinced of

of the dignity and uſefulneſs of his own profeſſion, that he conſidered it as the only one meriting the attention of reaſonable creatures, and, wherever he was admitted, introduced it as ſuch, without the leaſt regard to times, perſons, or places. It was impoſſible to ſit half an hour with the man of learning, without diſcovering his contempt for every kind of diſcourſe that was not tinctured, like his own, with the ſentiments and language of Ariſtotle or Plato. Divines were apt but too often to perplex the heads of young ladies at tea-tables with ſchool diſtinctions, and the depths of metaphyſics; and ſuch jargon terms as capias's, certiorari's, and premunire facias's, were more frequently the expreſſions of lawyers in the ſame company, than love and adoration, the natural language of the place. A military man no ſooner entered a room, than you aſſociated the diſcharge of artillery with his appearance. The authority of his voice ſilenced every milder ſubject of converſation, and the battles of Blenheim and Ramillies, ſo fatal to the enemy, were fought over again in very turbulent deſcription, to the no ſmall terror of his peaceable countrymen.

THE wits of thoſe times very finely raillied this foible: and it has indeed ſuffered ſuch diſcouragement in our days, that an abſurdity, the very reverſe, though leſs to be juſtified, has ſucceeded in it's place: I mean, a vicious affectation, in the preſent age, of avoiding that PEDANTRY which ſo diſtinguiſhed the preceding one.

THIS affectation has been purſued to ſuch lengths, that a perſon is eſteemed very deficient in good-breeding, who ventures to explain himſelf on any ſubject, however naturally it may ariſe in company, which genius, education, and his particular profeſſion have qua-

lified

lified him to ſupport. As a man of the world, he will divert the diſcourſe to any other ſubject, which, being entirely unacquainted with, he is ſecure of treating in a manner altogether removed from PEDANTRY. It is principally from this cauſe, that converſation, which formerly was the means of communicating knowledge with the freedom and delicacy peculiar to it, and which rendered the groves of Academus, the porches of Lycæum, and the walks of Tuſculum famous to poſterity, is degenerating into a uſeleſs and inſipid intercourſe; while the moſt trifling amuſements, that relieve us from the anxiety of it, receive all our encouragement.

IT is indeed no wonder that clubs and other ancient meetings for ſociety are growing out of faſhion, when punctilio not only obliges you to be ſilent on thoſe topics, which you are enclined, from your knowledge of them, to enter upon with freedom; but ſubjects you to the mortification of hearing them diſcuſſed by perſons who never talked or thought of them till the preſent moment. The ſituation of the ſpeaker too, in ſuch aſſemblies, can be no very deſirable one, while he is voluntarily impoſing the neceſſity on himſelf of attempting a ſubject, when unprovided with materials for it.

THIS cuſtom is in no ſort confined to mixed companies, where poſſibly ſome faint excuſes might be offered for it; but operates equally where men of the ſame profeſſion are collected, who, to avoid ſeeming PEDANTS in the eyes of each other, prefer obſcenity, impertinence, or abſurdity, to a converſation calculated to reflect mutual light on thoſe ſtudies, which, either in ſpeculation or practice, are the employment of their lives.

A VERY underſtanding friend of mine, who, till within this month, has not viſited London for five and twenty

twenty years, was lamenting to me ſeriouſly the viſible declenſion of knowledge in this kingdom, and ſeemed apprehenſive that a country ſo diſtinguiſhed for many ages, was relapſing again into it's ancient barbarity. I was ſomewhat ſurpriſed at the peculiarity of his ſentiments, but did not remain long unacquainted with the cauſe of them. It ſeems my friend had ſpent the greateſt part of that week in very different ſets of company. He had dined in the beginning of it at a viſitation, where the Britiſh herring fiſhery, and ſome propoſals reſpecting the public debt had very warmly intereſted the upper part of the table. He was the leſs in humour to reliſh this diſpute, as he had been kept up till three that very morning, in the neighbourhood of the exchange, as moderator in a controverſy on foreknowledge and freewill. The next day, in Lincoln's Inn Hall, he was not a little perplexed with the variety of opinions on the circulation of the blood, the production of chyle, and the powers of digeſtion. It was his fortune afterwards to be preſent at Batſon's coffee-houſe when the diſpoſition of the German army at the battle of Crotſka, and the laſt ſiege of Coni were ſeverely arraigned; and to liſten at the Tilt-yard to many objections againſt a decree in chancery, and to a diſcourſe employed to aſcertain the provinces of reaſon, law and equity. His greateſt mortification was in an admittance that morning to a junto of ſtateſmen near Whitehall, from whom nothing tranſpired after two hours attention to them, except ſome injudicious, though modeſt conjectures, on the future ſport of Newmarket races.

It was eaſy for me, after this explanation, to account for the indifferent opinion my friend had conceived of the

the divinity, law, and phyſic; the politics, military knowledge, and trade of the preſent times: and yet, from my acquaintance with the characters he had ſeen, I may venture to aſſert, what in another age might have the appearance of a paradox, that he had been converſing with the moſt eminent divines, lawyers, and phyſicians; with the ableſt ſtateſmen, ſkillfulleſt commanders, and moſt intelligent traders of any age or country.

This humour, it is to be feared, will by degrees infect the pen as well as the tongue; and that we ſhall have apothecaries advertiſing comments on Machiavel's art of war, and ſerjeants at law taking in ſubſcriptions for ſyſtems of chymeſtry, and diſſertations on midwifery. Every man's experience will probably inform him that it has already extended itſelf to epiſtolary writing. I have a late diſagreeable inſtance of it in my own family: it is in a young gentleman, who left England with the higheſt reputation, about a twelve-month ſince, to make what is called the tour of Europe. He parted from me with a promiſe of writing from Rome, where he propoſed to continue ſome time, after viſiting France, and the principal cities of Italy. As I had formed very agreeable expectations from this correſpondence, I muſt confeſs my diſappointment when his letter arrived. He never mentioned France, but to condemn the poſt-horſes; nor took notice of any circumſtance in his paſſage over the Alps, except the loſs of his hat and perriwig. One would have concluded him a cheeſe-monger from his deſcription of Parma. His obſervations on Florence were confined ſolely to it's wines: and though he was profoundly ſilent on the conſtitution of Lucca, he talked very particularly of the olives it produced. He had occaſionally interſperſed ſome anecdotes of himſelf: as that

he